



March 6, 2012

Hon. Sheila E. Hixson, Chair  
Ways and Means Committee  
Maryland House of Delegates

Re: House Bill 473

Dear Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Committee,

The Town of Garrett Park appreciates the opportunity to submit views concerning House Bill 473. This letter is offered by the Mayor and Town Council on behalf of the residents of the Town of Garrett Park. Garrett Park is a 114-year old independent municipality that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Although we are proud of our historic status, Garrett Park is a contemporary residential community; our residents include non-citizens who work at international organizations, as well as those who choose to retain their non-US citizenship for various purposes. These residents are involved in town activities, some in prominent working roles as committed volunteers, and are in many other ways an integral part of our community. In 2001, after several years of careful consideration of the issue, the Town Charter was amended to permit non-citizen voting in Town elections. The provision was approved by a referendum of all Town voters.

The Town of Garrett Park strongly opposes any effort to invalidate this democratically-enacted right for our residents. The Town also opposes any measure that restricts other municipalities from even considering the grant of local voting privileges to residents who happen not to be citizens. There are many circumstances that might cause a resident to choose to retain citizenship in the country of his or her birth, including the ability to travel back and forth more easily. This is especially important if elderly family members are a consideration. For those who choose to become citizens, it takes a minimum of five years. Most fundamentally, any resident should be allowed a voice; homeowners and taxpayers should have the right to influence how the use of their property is regulated.

We further believe that extending the right of non-citizen voting in local elections should be a matter for local decision; among other considerations, affording voting privileges to non-citizens is a good exercise in learning the responsibilities of democracy. Moreover, allowing non-citizens to vote brings them into community life and encourages their participation in all community activity.

Hon. Sheila E. Hixson

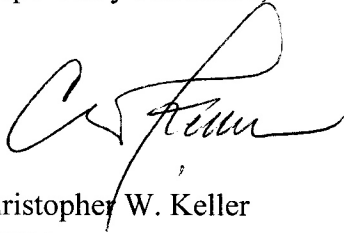
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At present, seven Maryland municipalities grant non-citizen voting rights. Those enactments reflect the will of local residents; they should not be nullified. Maryland municipalities should retain the right to encourage non-citizens to have the widest possible involvement in the communities where they reside.

On behalf of the residents and Town Council of the Town of Garrett Park,

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Keller', written over the printed name.

Christopher W. Keller  
Mayor

cc: District 17 Delegates  
Senator Jennie Forehand